

YOU ARE THERE

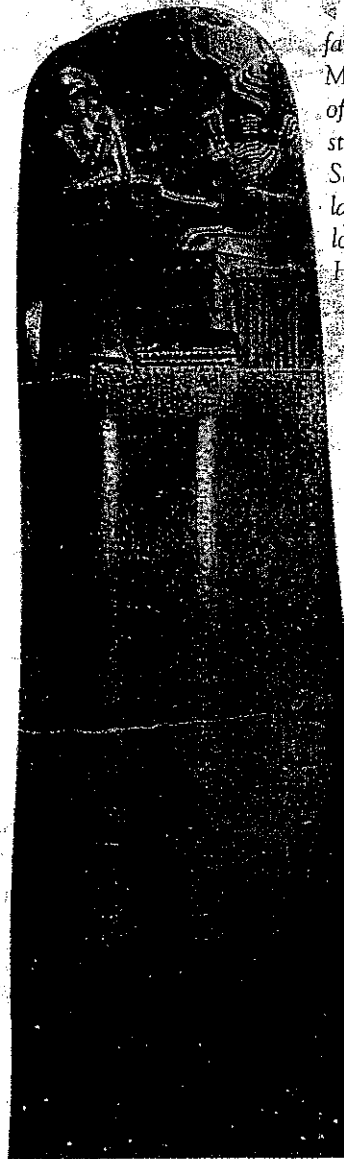
Justice in Mesopotamia

Although there were earlier Mesopotamian law codes, the Code of Hammurabi is the most complete. The law code emphasizes the principle of retribution ("an eye for an eye") and punishments that vary according to social status. Punishments could be severe, as these examples show.

The Code of Hammurabi

- 25: If fire broke out in a free man's house and a free man, who went to extinguish it, cast his eye on the goods of the owner of the house and has appropriated the goods of the owner of the house, that free man shall be thrown into that fire.
- 196: If a free man has destroyed the eye of a member of the aristocracy, they shall destroy his eye.
- 198: If he has destroyed the eye of a commoner or broken the bone of a commoner, he shall pay one mina of silver.
- 199: If he has destroyed the eye of a free man's slave or broken the bone of a free man's slave, he shall pay one-half his value.

The Code of Hammurabi was the most famous, though not the first, early Mesopotamian law code. The upper section of this stone monument shows Hammurabi standing in front of the seated sun god Shamash, who orders the king to record the law. The actual code is inscribed on the lower portion. Do you think the Code of Hammurabi could be enforced today?



1. Explain the principle of retribution.
2. According to the Code of Hammurabi, what was most highly valued in Mesopotamian society? What was the least valued? Explain your answers.
3. What is the guiding principle in the American criminal justice system? How does this compare with Hammurabi's justice?

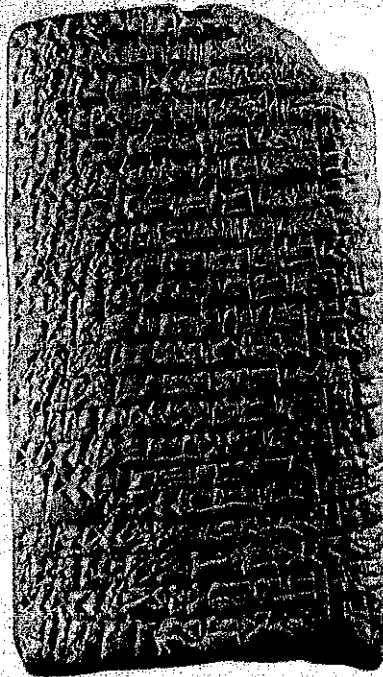
YOUNG PEOPLE IN MESOPOTAMIA

Sumerian Schools for Scribes

For boys of the upper class in Mesopotamia, becoming a scribe was the key to a successful career. There were thousands of scribes in Sumerian society. They kept the records for palaces and temples, the military, and the government. Men who began their careers as scribes became the leaders of their cities, temples, and armies. Scribes came to hold the most important positions in Sumerian society.

To become scribes, boys from wealthy families, many of them the sons of scribes, attended the new schools that were in operation by 2500 B.C. Young boys seeking to become scribes began school when they were small children and trained until they were young men. School days began at sunrise and ended at sunset. Discipline was harsh. The following essay, written by a teacher as a copying exercise for pupils, shows that punishments—being caned or beaten with a stick—were frequent:

In the tablet-house, the monitor said to me: "Why are you late?" I was afraid, my heart beat fast. I entered before my teacher, took my place. My "school-father" read my tablet to me, said, "The word is cut off," caned me. He who was in charge of drawing said "Why when I was not here did you stand up?" caned me.



▲ This tablet contains cuneiform instructions on how to perform a Babylonian marriage ritual.

He who was in charge of the gate said "Why when I was not here did you go out?" caned me. My teacher said "Your hand is not good," caned me.

Scribal students spent most of their school days following the same routine. They were taught by copying and recopying standard works on clay tablets and reciting from them. A Sumerian document reveals the routine.

*"What did you do in school?"
"I read my tablet, wrote it, finished it; then my prepared lines were prepared for me and in the afternoon, my hand copies were prepared for me."*

Copying prepared texts onto clay tablets day after day became boring. However, this was probably the only way of learning how to form the cuneiform signs neatly and correctly.

1. What skills did scribes possess that enabled them to become leaders in the government, military, and temples?
2. How were wealth and social class factors in the schools for scribes?
3. If you were a Sumerian teenager, would you have wanted to be trained as a scribe? Why or why not?